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LANCASHIRE DIALECT SOCIETY

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EDITORIAL

Few of us are able to see our actions as other people see them, and this particularly true of our speech. Our dialect is not one of the things which we are disposed to discuss dispassionately with people who speak a different dialect. For this reason we are fortunate to include in this issue the substance of the lecture 'on speaking with an accent' given last January by Mr. W. Haas, Senior Lecturer in General Linguistics at the University of Manchester. Mr. Haas treats a controversial subject with rare impartiality.

Another question upon which opinions are sharply divided is the status of city speech. Many people who consider it necessary to preserve our country dialects can find little to say for the common speech of our large towns, although perhaps we should except Cockney which has been accorded a position of honour where the others have not. Mr. Frank Shaw of Liverpool has no doubts about the speech of his native town and has contributed the first of a series of articles upon the subject.

The Journal is only one side of our Society's activities. For many members the year will have been made memorable by the meeting which was held at Hornby Castle by invitation of Sir Harold Parkinson, who has once again demonstrated how active a president he is.

We are honoured in having three new patrons: the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, the Earl of Woolton, and Professor W. Mansfield Cooper who is Vice Chancellor of the University of Manchester. All are prominent Lancastrians, and are well known and respected outside the bounds of their native county.

ON SPEAKING WITH AN ACCENT

W. HAAS

Not to be familiar with the Lancashire dialect must be a handicap for anyone addressing the Lancashire Dialect Society. But not to be altogether at home with Standard English either may be a redeeming virtue. It establishes a certain area of common interest. I, whose native tongue is *not* English, share something with those, whose native tongue is an English *dialect*.

When I try to speak Standard English, and the speaker of an English dialect tries to do it, neither of us quite succeeds; we both deviate from the rule. The reason is that we are both, each in his way, bilingual. We have each two languages which we keep for different occasions. I speak one language with my wife, and switch over to another when I enter the University. A Lancashire farmer will speak dialect when talking to his neighbours; but when a motoring townsman comes past asking his way, he will trim his speech to something closer to Standard English. That is, he will try; but like myself he can never quite get it. And the source of the trouble is that each of us has two distinct speaking-habits co-existing within him, which cannot be neatly kept apart. Ordinarily—that is, if we ignore linguistic virtuosos—we find that two such habits keep interfering with one another. When one language is being spoken, the other intrudes; some traces of that other one are present as what we call an "accent"—a dialectal accent or a foreign one. Bilingualism is the ultimate explanation of accent even in the case of people who cannot speak any dialect or foreign language, and yet speak with an accent. Their ancestors were bilingual. In their time, *they* had to struggle with its intrusion into the Standard language, and the outcome of their struggle was a compromise, namely, the "accent" which they bequeathed to their children.

Most commonly, when we discuss questions of accent, we are concerned with the social consequences. We contemplate the unfair privileges of the standard-accent—the separating-off of our group from other English speakers by something like an "accent-bar"—; or we ask what it is that makes some accents socially more acceptable than others; or, again, we discuss the merits and demerits of standardisation. All these questions are important. But they seem to be already receiving the attention which they deserve (for example, more recently, in A. P. Rossiter's interesting book of broadcast talks, *Our Living Language*). This is why it seemed to me to be worth while, for once, to take leave of the emotionally-charged sociological discussions concerning the *uses* of accent, and turn to the linguistic study of its *nature*.

There have been developments in linguistic studies, recently, in the light of which something new might appear in those familiar facts. To study the somewhat freakish conditions of linguistic interference may easily offer us a glimpse, among the other marvels of language, of something that would escape notice in the smooth working of either standard or dialectical speech.

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What exactly do we mean when we say of someone that he speaks with an accent? Obviously not that he speaks a dialect, and not that he speaks unintelligibly. We mean that having mastered the essentials of the standard-language, he deviates from it in matters of minor detail. But then: what are essentials, and what, minor details?—This brings us straight to the heart of the matter, and also to the point where modern approaches to phonetic studies prove to be especially useful. Modern "functional" phonetics, as it is called, has ceased to look upon the sound-features which we produce in speaking a language, as being all of equal importance. It has introduced principles of gradation. There are precise criteria of relevance by which some sound-features are judged to be more important than others.

The distinction between more and less important is easily illustrated by foreigners' mispronunciations. In trying to pronounce the long vowel in words like *lawn*, *thought*, *saw*, a Frenchman or German tends to replace it by a closer variety (o:), such as does not exist in Standard-English but may sometimes be heard in some parts of Scotland, in words like *more*, *door*, *pour* (mo:r, do:r, po:r). A sentence, say, *I thought you saw it on the lawn*, pronounced in this way, would sound queer to English ears. But it would not be any worse than that. It would still be quite intelligible; it would only be a case of a foreign accent.

A Frenchman, however, might go further here; he might make the long vowel into a diphthong (ou). This would be a more serious deviation from the standard; and it is easy to see why. As long as English was being replaced by a non-English sound (o:) which yet lies near — nearer to the required sound than to any other in English—there was no danger of confusing utterances or words of different meaning. But now, this English vowel is being replaced by an English diphthong (ou). As a result, *saw* sounds like *sow* (or *so*) and *lawn* like *loan*, and similarly *ball* like *bowl*, *hall* like *hole*, etc. The native hearer reacts violently to the mere danger of such confusion: he fails to understand. This is worse than speaking with an accent. True, one and the same type of English sound—one "phoneme"—has many variants, all eligible for adoption and use without annoyance.

But a speaker must not transgress the "security margin", as it were, which divides all of the many acceptable variants of one English phoneme — from any of the acceptable variants of another. (The useful notion of "security margin" has been recently introduced by A. Martinet, cf. his "*Economie des changements phonetiques*".)

It is as with the traffic-lights, with their red, yellow, green. The exact shade of the colour is not important as long as a safe margin is kept between the three. But suppose the green becomes rather bluish (as has happened in some streets of Manchester): if now someone fancied a rather mauve tint of red, we should come near to a confusion of messages, and motorists would react by not understanding.

Even a dialect-speaker switching to the standard-language may not always succeed in avoiding a confusion of different phonemes; and then he will do worse than betray a regional accent. If a Frenchman tends to replace English *th* by *f* or *v* (thus confusing *thought* and *fought*, *thrill* and *frill*, *three* and *free*, or the like), he will be comforted to hear Londoners doing the same, e.g. pronouncing *mother thinks* as (move finks). Again, if he drops the *h*'s confusing *hedge* with *edge*, *heart* with *art* and the like, he will find himself in the heartening company of native English speakers from various parts of the country.

However, such confusions of standard-phonemes as a dialect-speaker might commit are few, and, although going beyond the limits of "having an accent", they are less serious than many others that a foreign speaker is liable to. There is a further gradation, then, amongst these "phonemic" confusions. Whether it is more or less serious to disregard a difference of phonemes, depends on how important that difference is—how frequently and how prominently it might have served to distinguish utterances of different meaning. Phoneticians have come to speak here of the "functional load" of the distinction. To illustrate:—there are comparatively few utterances which differ only as *th* differs from *f*. On the other hand, if we turn to the usual German mispronunciation of *th* as *s*, we find that the difference here being obliterated is one of greater importance: its loss would destroy the contrast between very many contrastive pairs, *think—sink*, *thought—sought*, *thick—sick*, *mouth—mouse*, and so on. Different again, and illustrative of a less serious mispronunciation, is the case of Lancashire people who find it difficult to pronounce the short central vowel (ʌ) of words like *cut*, *butter*, etc. and replace it by the back-vowel (u) of *put* or *butcher*. Very few semantic distinctions are lost to us by this mispronunciation. In fact, I can think only of one—the golf-term (*pʌtin*) as against (*putin*). A Lancashire man would get these very much the same. But our loss would not be great.

To put it technically, the functional load of this distinction is very light.

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There is some interest—theoretical as well as practical—in examining the reasons for particular mispronunciations. For the deviations from the standard-language are not capricious; the interference of the other language or dialect, to which they are due, works in a predictable way. If we know the speaker's native dialect or language, we are more or less able to say, before listening to him, what his mispronunciations will be, when he tries, say, Standard English.

Mispronunciations may be mapped out, as replacements, omissions, additions, and compromises.

If a Cockney-speaker or a Frenchman or German tends to replace the voiceless *th* of Standard English (as in *three*) by *f* or *s*, the reason is that they have no *th* in their dialect or their native tongue. What they tend to pronounce—and they even tend to hear it—is something fished out from their own reserves of sound-material which comes near the required sound. These approximations, which never quite hit the mark, can be plotted, if we compare the two phonetic systems. English *th* may be defined by three "distinctive features": it is pre-dental, voiceless and fricative. The substituted *f* is labio-dental, voiceless, fricative, and *s* is post-dental, voiceless, fricative. We find, then, that in mispronouncing *th* as either *s* or *f*, two of its characteristic features are reproduced, namely, the voiceless and the fricative, and only one, namely the pre-dental, replaced. The latter feature —the pre-dental—does not occur in Cockney or German or French, while the "labio-dental" of *f* and the "post-dental" of *s* do. So whether *f* or *s* is substituted for *th*, the substitute is the nearest approximation to *th* that seems to be possible with the speaker's native sound-material.

The dropping of *h*'s by Frenchmen, and speakers of certain English dialects, has a similar explanation. This elusive puff of breath (h) has no significant role to play in French, or in some English dialects; moreover, the distinctive role it has even in Standard English is strictly limited. It is recognised as significant only before vowels. Even speakers of Standard English will hardly notice it in other positions, e.g. after initial *p*, *t*, *k*, in words like *part*, *tea*, *cake*. It is easy, then, for others to fail to notice it, and to omit it, in *all* positions—including the prevocalic, where it is more important.

Mistaken addition of a sound is not less frequent than mistaken omission. If an Englishman is asked to pronounce the Welsh voiceless *l* of, say, *llan-*, he will tend to keep to his own familiar *l*, which is always voiced, and add the voicelessness in the shape of a separate antecedent *th*; of llan- he

makes *thlan-*. For the same reason, a Frenchman would tend to say *-flan*, a German (*-xlan*).

Lastly, the mispronunciation may consist in a compromise between two languages. For example a German in speaking English, may have succeeded in pronouncing *w* bilabially, that is, forming it with both lips, and, to that extent, keep it distinct from labiodental *v*. But he may still speak it with his lips spread, as for his familiar *v*, instead of having them rounded and protruding, as for *u*. He will then produce a compromise-sound, which occurs in Spanish and seems to have occurred in Primitive Germanic, but which does not exist in either German or English. This deviation might still pass as mere foreign accent, but it comes rather near to invading the security-margin which separates English *w* from *v*.

It is important to note that any such deviation—replacement, omission, addition, or compromise—might affect a sound only in *some* of its positions. Fundamentally, the case is the same as that of a particular sound-*feature* causing difficulty only in some of its occurrences. We have seen that an Englishman finds it easy to combine "voicelessness" with "predental" as in *th*, with "labio-dental", as in *f*, or with "post-dental", as in *s*, but hard to combine it with "lateral", i.e. with the *l*- position of the tongue, as in Welsh *ll*. Similarly, a speaker may find a whole sound ("phoneme") familiar in some combinations but strange, and hard to pronounce, in others. A German or Russian, for instance, will be familiar with Standard English voiced consonants *b*, *d*, *g*, *v*, *z*, but find them difficult at the end of a word. He will pronounce correctly *bit*, *Dick*, *glass*, *lover*, *miser*, but tend to replace *rib* by *rip*, *rod* by *rot*, *wig* by *wick*, *love* by *laugh*, *rise* by *rice*. The reason is that in Russian or German voiced consonants do not occur in final position.

English speakers are familiar with the combination *ts* in words like *cats*, *outside*, *curtsy*, but not at the beginning of words, as in German *Zeit* (*tsait*) "time" or, even worse, with following (v) as in *zwei* (tsvai) "two" or *zwischen* (tsvisan) "between".

Again, if an English speaker is confronted with a Czech word like *prst* "finger", which contains familiar sounds, but in an unfamiliar combination, he will tend to hear a vowel that is not there, and he will insert it in his own pronunciation of the word, making it *pirst* or (parst). The cluster *rst* is as much as he would take, is in his repertoire; it is somewhat familiar to him perhaps from the Scottish pronunciation of words like *first*, *thirst*. For a Japanese even *rst* would be too great a tongue-twister. In *his* repertoire there are not any consonantal clusters at all; his language does not know them, nor has it a word ending in a consonant (except in *n*); and *he*

will tend to hear and to pronounce *prst* as something like *pirisuto*.

If two languages combine sounds or sound-features differently, i.e. differ in *phonological structure*, this is as rich a source of interference and mispronunciation as is any difference between their two sets of sounds and sound-features. More recent phonetic studies have been giving increasing prominence to such "structural" considerations. (Especially relevant to our topic is U. Weinreich's recent study on *Languages in Contact*).

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It is in their structures that the various dialects of one language are especially close to one another; and this is why dialectal interference with the standard-language is bound to be far less serious than is a foreign language interfering.

Let us assume interference by a language which differs *only* in its repertoire of elements, i.e. in its set of distinctive sounds and sound-features from the one interfered with, but not at all in phonological structure. The relation of the two tongues would be rather like that between speech and writing (phonetic writing) or speech and the grooves in a gramophone record. The elements are very different here: sounds, marks on paper, groovings in wax. But there is an exact correspondence between them. There are as many different types of sound in the speech as there are types of ink-mrks in the phonetic writing or types of groove on the disc; and types of sound combine with one another in the same ways as do types of ink-mark or types of groove. The various sequences of sounds (in words and utterances) must then all have their replica in sequences of ink-marks or wax-grooves. In such a case, we are inclined to say that we are dealing with a single language, as spoken, as written on paper, or as grooved into discs. If we know one variant, we soon understand the others. We only need to "translate" a few dozens of "phonological" elements learn how each appears in speech, in writing and in groove, and the rest—the whole vocabulary and the grammar—are "the same" in all three media.

Now, the relation of dialects to one another, though not exactly, is very nearly like that. Dialects of the same language differ in elements rather than in structure. The result is that even a dialect which confuses two phonemes of the standard may leave us as rich as ever in distinct words. A Cockney speaker will tend to replace Standard English *ay* (ei), of *I pray* by *y* (ai) saying *I pry* instead. But there will be no real confusion . True, the distinction is obliterated between his way of saying a word, and the standard pronunciation of another word. But say the other word *too* in his way, and there *is* a difference. Thus the Cockney speaker, instead of

the (ai) of *I pry, Let's buy a tie*, etc., will give us *oy: I proy. Let's boy a toy*, and instead of the *oy* of *A good boy. A toy.*, he will introduce a new diphthong (o:i) and say *A good* (*bo:*), A (*to:i*). We thus establish a regular correspondence between the diphthongs of Standard English and those of Cockney: [(ei = ai), (ai = i), (i = o: i).]. There is this similarity of structure which makes speakers even of widely different dialects able to follow one another's speech very soon—after a few weeks, even days—while it would take them years to understand as much of a foreign language. Speakers of different dialects virtually only need to "translate" the few phonemes with regard to which they differ; whereas speakers of different languages must learn to translate thousands of new words and acquire a new grammar. There are indeed dialectical differences in vocabulary and grammar; but by comparison, these are very few.

Similarity of structure is also the reason why, in switching from a dialect to the standard, we find it easy to keep our deviations within the limits of 'having an accent', whereas in switching to a foreign language, we are in constant danger of doing worse.

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The principles which come to light in studying linguistic interference, as it occurs in bilingual speakers, have some important applications. One that comes to mind immediately is the contribution such a study can make to language teaching. Our method of teaching a foreign language is bound to gain in efficiency, if we know what interferences to expect from the learner's native tongue—in vocabulary and grammar no less than in phonology—, and if we can grade these interferences according to their relative seriousness; we shall know then where to attack, and how to grade our exercises according to their relative importance. English lessons for a Frenchman will have to differ very much from those for, say, a Russian or a Japanese—much more so than seems to be recognized at present.

Again, the study of linguistic interference must have a bearing on dialectology and the historical study of language. We hear language historians speak of primary languages overlaid by later arrivals, of linguistic "substrata" and "superstrata", and the like. If we are to give substance to these familiar historical assumptions, we must study the mechanism of such superposition where we can observe it—that is, in the linguistic behaviour of bilingual speakers.

Lastly, it appears that these processes of interference should be of interest to the psychologist and sociologist. The

way in which two languages, meeting within a single person, influence one another might provide a model for explaining how two different civilisations, having made contact within a single community, come to terms. Ultimately, what we wish to know here is, after all, how single individuals act and react, each trying to make one whole life out of varied, and often conflicting influences.

In the study of language, even when tackling a problem that seems to me narrowly circumscribed, it happens frequently that, as we proceed, we find ourselves ranging over a wide field of unexpected implications. So it happens in this case. There is more to "speaking with an accent" than catches the ear.

PROGRAMME FOR 1958

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Thursday, February 13th. After the business of the evening has been dealt with, Mrs. Alice Miller, Editor of The Record of the Lancashire Authors' Association, will speak on "Dialect—Pure and Simple."

On Thursday, May 15th Professor Brook will speak on "Slang and Dialect."

On Thursday, November 13th, the Annual Members' Meeting will be held, at which members will contribute dialect readings of their own work or the work of others, and discuss topics of dialect interest.

All meetings will be held in the Arts Building of the University of Manchester and will commence at 7-30 p.m.

KITLIN' UP A THREE

Wod use are thowts like flame to thee,
A freetened kitlin' up a three?
Staark terror clampin' deawn booath ears
To thy wee body, tense wi' fears!

Wod 'elp is Fancy, liftin' wings
To thee fast cheeoned to sthrange new things?
Explorer prisoned, een like glass,
Wheer t' thraffic rowls an' t' fooak pass!

Nod a' this dallyin' near Jack's wa';
Er t' cooaxin' worrds as rise an' fa':
Ner t' colours uv this Autumn day,
Con lure thee back to t' th' earth to play!

This is no time to frame a rhyme,
When t' th' heawr hes come a three to climb:
Wheer, sma' as onny woman's glove,
A kitlin' frets an' staarves above!

ALICE MILLER.

A HEYD FER BOOTS AN' BRASS

(Cameo fro' "HOBSON'S CHOICE".)

*Ah geets picked up wi' Maggie; aye, mi mesthur's owdust lass:
A spinsthur an' a taarthur, wi' a heyd fer boots an' brass
Ah never wer' so flummuxed as thad day hoo nabbled me:
Aye, me! a nobri an' a slave to t' th' owd chap's tyranny!

Ah med a staart wi' Maggie, ee, by gum, Ah did an' o'!
Hoo bowt t' brass ring fer t' weddin', an' hoo didna think id low!
Hoo dhragged me fro' mi lodgin's, an' hoo took me fro' ' er dad:
An' in eawr cellar, heaw hoo waarked an' planned—just think o' thad!

Ah couldna write, Ah couldna speyk, Ah couldna doo a sum:
Ah didna waant Miss Maggie; but Ah changed—Ah did, by gum!
Hoo showed me heaw to write mi name, an' heaw to use mi thrade:
Ah' neaw Ah know it's t' softust chaps as need a monlike-maid!

Ah didna kiss Miss Maggie, fer hoo flayed me, till Ah knew
Id needed mooar ner kisses an' sichlike to pull me through!
Hoo put sich staarch in gradely cuffs, sich whalebooan in mi will:
An' teyched me weel fro' Life to tek—mi just dues, an' mi fill!

ALICE MILLER.

* (Willie Mossop in "Hobson's Choice")

BLACKBR'YIN'

The'r gooin' a-blackbr'yin' awhile it's still leet:
Eawr Thomas's lass, an' t' tothers:
A' laughin' an' sheawtin' an' thrutchin' abeawt——
T' big wenches wi' the'r teeny brothers!

Ther's a fresh nip in t' th' air, as it's near on back-end:
Too shaarp, aye, to my way o' thinkin':
But ther's berries galore, an' the'r rare uns fer t' dish,
Near t' th' 'edges —— in t' late sun black-winkin'!

The'r fawse as they mek um, these young uns uv eawrs,
Wi' t' baskuts, a' pikin' an' skrikin':
Fer it's nobbut a 'scuse to dil-dally in t' dusk——
T' tame fireside's nod yet to the'r likin'!

ALICE MILLER.

A SURVEY OF ENGLISH FOLKLORE

A survey of English Folklore, with the object of building up archives of folklore materials, is being made by the English Department of University College, London, under the guidance of Professor A. H. Smith.

For the purpose of the survey, folklore has been defined as the study of traditional elements in English life and customs, and among the topics covered by the survey will be folk tales, anecdotes, beliefs and superstitions, traditional plays, games, pastimes, and similar activities.

The two main sources of information are the evidence of living persons and documentary evidence. Of these the former is the one which requires most urgent attention. The great movements of population during the Industrial Revolution, together with the great urban developments and changing social conditions of our own time, have led to the decline of many former customs, and immediate action is necessary if records of the remaining traces are to be made.

One method of collection will be by use of a questionaire, although the organisers hope that collectors will not be restricted by this form of investigation and will make their answers as full as possible, including all material of value even where it is not strictly relevant.

A large number of voluntary collectors is needed from all counties. Further information may be obtained from the Editor, or directly from: The English Folklore Survey, University College, Gower Street, London, W.C.1.

DIALECT OF A SEAPORT

[Frank Shaw, a Liverpool Customs officer in his forties, has written a good deal in recent years on the "Scouse lingo" in his native city and he has also lectured on the subject and broadcast on it—"through my own nose". Early this year he, with an actor, Jack Gordon, made a series of gramophone records in the lingo to preserve it for posterity and these are now in the Liverpool City Libraries archives. And, a few years ago, a play by him in Liverpoolese, a General Strike comedy, was frequently performed by amateurs in Liverpool district and elsewhere, including the Free Trade Hall, Manchester.

The speech of the seaport, although it is related to Lancashire (see Frank Shaw's "Death of a Dialect," "Manchester Guardian," 20/4/'54), is so distinct as to merit the name of a dialect though some academicians would deny it.

Frank Shaw is no academician and his approach to the subject is that of one delighting in racy and idiosyncratic language with little knowledge of origins. In this series about the form of speech, however, which will, naturally embrace more than the "lingo," since it is bound up with the local customs and traditions of those who speak it, he will, however, at a final stage go into sources as well as devoting attention to the way Liverpudlians use their varied treasury of queer words and phrases. But with this instalment we simply plunge into facts about what the Scouser calls himself and his friends and family and what they call him as well as something about the mysterious food Scouse itself and other dishes popular in the 'Pool.]

1.—DICKY SAM, FRISBY DYKE, AND SCOUSE

Dicky Sam is a native of Liverpool as Geordie is a Novocastrian and Sandy is a Scot. Some would reserve the name only for one born on Mann Island, a now vanished part of Liverpool's waterfront, as a Cockney is strictly one born within the sound of Bow Bells. There is no justification for this, nor for confining Scousetown to the area about Scotland Road. The name nowadays is most often given to one of the older generation possessing those qualities the native most admires: quickwittedness and an urban contempt for the slow, the dull and stupid; ready of speech, not subservient, never demonstrative. It is not met so often now, and no one knows why it was chosen. Liverpool likes double names (Maggie May, Johnny Joe) but why they chose Dicky Sam is beyond conjecture. There are many Richards and Samuels in the list of Freemen, and a few Mayors bore the names. The name is found in lists of Liverpool ships, including

privateers. It has been ventured that Dicky Sam means a "little Yank," Sam being an old nickname for a Yank or American and "dicky" an old slang word for "little" (it is the name for a little—and detachable—shirt-front, for instance). I can find no support for this piece of what I suppose etymologists would call conjectural etymology of the sort which derived Alexander the Great from all-eggs-under-the-grate; but the Liverpudlian is certainly often quite Transatlantic in his ways and in his nasal speech.

"Frisby Dyke" is the outsider's name for a Liverpudlian (from the character bearing the name of a Liverpool shop-keeper which caught the fancy of Tommy Handley and was played by Deryck Guyler in the radio show ITMA). In the Forces we are called Scouse or *Scouser* from our alleged partiality for Scouse. What Scouse is I shall presently show.

Is it Liverpolitan or Liverpudlian? In refined circles the former tends to oust the more Northcountry jannock name. It is quite permissible, and both might be retained, using the Latinised name for things and the other for people. A real Liverpool "whacker" does not with ease bear the Liverpolitan title. It is more suited to the "bay window" classes in Mossley Hill ("Plus fours an' no Breckfist").

In an article in "Punch" entitled "The Liverpool Indicator" (30th May, 1956) I mocked the current U and non-U fad in provincial terms by showing how Liverpool had two classes, Scouse and non-Scouse, and it could be said that the Liverpolitan is he who, though he might eat it, will not talk about Scouse or admit to liking it and assert vehemently, in pure Scouse, that he does not speak like a Scouser either. In a local paper I have since taken to calling the two classes Pol and Pud. The reader must realise that, though some delight in all which comes under the name of Scouse in speech and habits, they are a dying race—the forces against local custom and talk working elsewhere so successfully are working in Liverpool too. Many Liverpool people dislike the whole business and see the speech form as nothing but shamefully debased English with not even its decided comicality to recommend it. But there are educated Scousers too, holding firmly to what Ivor Brown called "The importance of being parochial".

A *whacker* started by being a friend (one who shared things, "whack" being an old Army word for rations). Many Liverpudlians refer to themselves as whackers. "Ello, me oul whacker" is now an expression familiar from the Dave Morris Club Night radio show.

Anyhow, their city is the POOL as London is the Smoke, and the nickname certainly commemorates the very origin of the city, and what was for long its main feature. (The old

Pool was filled in at the beginning of the 18th Century). Why Liverpool? It is certainly nothing to do with the "mythical" Liver bird. It is not mythical; the bird is a cormorant, quite fitting as a tutelary for a seaport which started as a fishing village, though some say it is the Eagle of St. John from the City Arms. The city's name can be found spelt in at least sixteen ways from early times (Lyrpol, Llyrpul, Llyrpwll, Lerpole, Leverpol, Lirpolle, Lieurpole, Letherpoole, Leverepul, Lerpul, Lirpole, Lyverpoll, Leverpoole, Lerpol, Lyverpool). Liver- arrives quite late.

Carlyle thought it was §Lither-pool, but the modern student favours Lyfrig-pool (sluggish pool); so did the guide on Liverpool Overhead Railway Dock tours (now, alas, gone with the railway). Was it sluggish? Could it have anything to do with Lir? This figure in Celtic mythology had his children turned into swans for nine hundred years. It would be interesting to prove that Liverpool was half-Irish from its earliest times. (Possible origin also of the district of Old Swan? which liberal tram-conductors called "The Ancient Duck"—and now the trams, alas, are also gone). It might have been London-pool as Derry became Londonderry for in 1628 the city rights were sold to London's Corporation. The Molyneux family bought them back and later re-sold them to the city.

Whatever the origin, to Dicky Sam it is "our town"—and he's proud of it. But then, all his family and possessions will be either "our" (pronounced *awr* or *are*), or "my" (pronounced *me*) thus, *our Flo*, *our Richie*, *our Jamesey*, *me auntie*, *me 'at*, and a brother, whatever his age, is invariably—*Our Kid*. Dicky Sam has no pet names for his wife, but he may borrow the Cockney rhyming slang as on other occasions, to call her "the trouble" (trouble and strife).

Me Mam is his mother. Children say *Our Mam* as "Can I ave a jam butty, our mam, yew wait—yer promizt".

With no lack of respect, his mother is called *The Old Lady* (pronounced *Ould** and accented on the adjective rather than on the noun), and even *The Old One* or the *Old Girl*. The transition from *Mam* to the *Old Girl* is gradual, and children think it daring;—"I'd be scurred if she hurd me". Similarly, Father is the *Old Feller*, or the *Old Man*, but other relations receive the prefix *The*,—"This is the brother" or "I was with the uncil." The *Judy* is a fiancee, or the female

§ Cp. Lither-land, Nether-ton.

* Of course this is pure Dublinese. No wonder when he came to the 'Pool Jim Phelan said 'I thought I was in Dublin.' The Irish newspaper writer, John Sheridan, in his 'My Hat Blue Off' has an interesting essay on the affectionate use of the word 'ould' (or 'owl' as he prefers) and, in his 'The Right Time,' another on the niceties expressed by 'the': 'this is the brother' is more intimate an introduction than 'this is me brother.'

you " are knocking about with ". All girls were once Judies and apparently still are in Damon Runyan's New York. In Liverpool the name is dying out, though a ship's fireman still declares to the Customs " A couple er plugs for duh Judy's old feller " and " some scent for the old girl ". *Tart* is also used for girl, and usually has no offensive intent. For a while after the first World War *Pusher* was frequently heard, and later, *Skin*. Today, the universal *Jane* and *Dame* are common. Among girls themselves, a mutual form of address which seems invariable is *Kid*—" 'onest, Kid, if me Mam 'ad known, she'd ave murdered me."

The name Judy of course is used throughout the Royal Navy but the Liverpudlian makes most use of it. He has indeed a great affection for Punch and Judy, something in the jovial pugnaciousness of the puppets appeals to him, and when an attempt was made to remove the century old Punch and Judy show, run by Professor Codman, in the centre of a busy street near the railway station, there was public uproar; it had to be moved, but to a valuable site on the Georges Hall steps! Tommy Handley, the great Scouser, always spoke of the Georges Hall as being, " you know, whack, behind the Punchanjewdy show."

My feller with the accent on the " my " is a fiancee or husband. " My feller just 'ates fish for his tea." Which brings us to *Fellers* generally. It is a popular word in the *Pool* and is in no way insulting.* The usage is Irish. A stranger will be hailed civilly " Eh feller, gi's a light ", and the cigarette, probably down to its last inch, will be thrust right into the stranger's " gob ".

" Bo " is sometimes used instead in American fashion, " Gi's a light, Bo' " and children say, " *Eh yew la'* " (i.e. lad) or " *Eh yew, girl* " (or " Sis ") or just " *Eh yew (or youse).*" But the fellers are a man's friends. Thus two eleemosynary bodies take the name: Glee-fellows who sing for Charity, Cue-fellows who play billiards to that end. " I'm goin to duh match with duh fellers " one will hear. Tradesmen get feller* brought into their name as *bread-feller, coal-feller, gas-feller, bin-feller.* The bin-feller is also known as, and calls himself, the *Muck-man* or *Midden-man.* The sanitary dustbin is the *Midden* so in course jest M.P.'s are " Midden Pickers "). The insurance collector escapes " feller ". He (hated and feared in poor areas) is *the Clubman*, the association being with the old burial clubs.

Lads as well as fellers are a man's friends (" I bin out wit duh lads fr a few bevvies "). Boy is not heard outside

*Mr. Pickwick angrily called Mr. Tapman a fellow but the word started out as quite a friendly one (hail-fellow-well-met, schoolfellow) and when used by the gentry to their servants was meant to be matey.

the bourgeosie quarters but there are *milk-lads*, *bread-lads*, *'andcart-lads* and *Echo-lads* who sell papers.

The close friend is a *Whacker*, as we said, the feller with whom one shares or *Whacks*. It is by no means always certain whether Liverpool got the slang from the Army or vice versa; I feel sure Liverpool was first to have much now recognised R.N. slang. Among his friends he may have *Basil* (fat fellow), *Jud* (George), a *Mark* (one who likes a mark which means a jest), a *Skinamalink* (thin person) and perhaps *Tich* (a little fellow after Tich the actor, who took his name from the huge Tichborne Claimant), *Nuck*, *Naishe* (Ignatius), *Corny* (Cornelius, a popular Irish name).

There might even be a Queer Eel that is a "doubtful person" or, rather, as with Sampson Brass, one about whom there was no doubt! And among good nicknames I recall the Blood Donor for a pale person and for a hatch foreman who was always saying "Let her go"—the Lenient Judge.

Besides queer eels we have difficult fellows ("Narks", but that is not Liverpudlian), *The Bold Fellow* and *The Queer Fellow*. This last is an Irish name for an absent friend; your listener will know quite well to whom you refer.§ Likewise with *Meladdo*.

There will in the poor and gloomy streets be many queer and doubtful characters dodging the *Jacks* (detectives), the *Scuffers* (Police, *Slops*, also being used) or their friends. Generically this underworld is described as *Rowdies*, *Bucks*, *Buckos*, *and* (rarely now) *Prigs*. In each case the word has a different meaning from what it has in other lingoes, e.g., there is nothing stylish about the Buck and the Rowdy may be very silent. Ordinary low people are *Scruffs* and it is strange to find the Army generally calling the Liverpool Regiments. The Scruffy Kings.* Scruff also used in Glasgow was, first, cheap fish in Newfoundland, 1866, says Eric Partridge. A Buck's child soon learns to give *Old Buck* (impudence) to older people and to try to be a *Hard Skin* (hard case). "E's a ard skin", is sometimes said "E shaves wit a blow-lamp".

Impudent children are also said to be *Hard-Faced*, brassy, *Hard-Clock*, and bad manners is always described as *Ignorance*. ("E wuddin bid yuh duh time er day; its only 'is ignorance").

The linal descendants of the Hi Rip Gangs, suppressed by the Great Judge Dey by lavish use of "the cat", and of the petty thieves of "Sevastopol" (Juvenal Street area) and, earlier yet, of the Roaring Forties and of the Mulveys, who were highwaymen in Marybone,

§ N.B.—Brendan Behan's Irish play 'The Quare Fella.'

* Like perhaps Quaker, Jesuit, The Old Contemptibles, a name borne with pride after being given in derision. Anyhow like many a good regiment the Scruffy Kings will soon be no more.

still live hard and without work and fight, with no regard to Queensbury Rules, using the knee, the head, the boot: rarely, as in Glasgow, razors or broken bottles.

The town is full too of imaginary folk whose origin one can seldom trace:— such as Dick Spit, Dick Tuft, Hicky the Firebobby. In court in 1952, a Police Officer stated "Prisoner gave the name of Joe Soap". This false name is one people give to themselves in self pitying mood. "Everyone puts on me, I'm Joe Soap" or "Jimmy Green"; there are ruder versions. Jimmy Green came from Lancashire and may be associated with one of David Poole, the ventriloquist's dolls, a shrewd fellow posing as a softie. "Act soft an' I'll buy yew a coalyard", i.e. the person who is obviously shrewd can be done by the Jimmy Green type. Mary Mint is a slatternly woman; Lord Muck a dressy person; Lively Polly, a lethargic female (it is a trade name as was Sunny Jim); Professor Messer was an interferer.

Among the dunces again are Billy Muggins (from an old Music-hall song), Phil Garlick (from the archaic English—met in Urquhart's Rabelais—"pilgarlic", a poor person, one who peels garlic) and Mickie Dripping.

Who was Daddy Bunchy, once quoted as a bogey, and Tom Hall, legendary proprietor of a well-known hostelry? Johhny All Sorts is the proprietor of a shop which sells bacon, bootlaces paraffin oil and thick twist, etc. Johnny Know All is from Lancashire, of course, Paddy Irish, was given to a fish-seller, commemorated in a rhyme:—

> Paddy Irish sells fish,
> Three ha'pence a dish,
> If you don't like Paddy Irish,
> You don't like his fish.

(but he and Billy the Barber will be met later with other tradesmen). Such persons mingle in anecdote with real persons notably:— George Wise, Stuart Deacon, John Hughes ("John Hughes won't save yer"—catchphrase c. 1917), Billy Bennett, Dan Higgins, Mother Noblett, Hughie Burgess, Tom MacInerny, Major Dawson, Miss Crosby, Madge Kirby, W. W. Kelly. These were, in the order named:— A leader of militant protestantism; a stipendiary magistrate for many years—a very wise gentleman; a shopkeeper; the comedian who was "almost a gentleman" and made Queen Mary laugh; a butcher; the populariser of Everton toffee which was invented by Mollie Burgess; a famous local detective; a wrestler who later kept the Feathers, a popular resort among Ship's Officers; a racing tipster; a teacher with advanced ideas; child-victim of an atrocious murder; actor-manager who ran for years "A Royal Divorce".

To this end must now be added Bessie. The redoubtable Liverpool woman M.P. is the heroine of a good story. She was said to have boasted that Liverpudlians, a mixture of the races in these islands, spoke the purest English and she brought a Director of

Education to a school to hear one particular Welsh boy who was outstanding as an English speaker. When Bessie strode into the class-room and said "Stand up Hughes!" the whole class stood up.

* * * *

I had Scouse this last summer in Germany. It was on the menu as Labscas and it is found in Scandinavia as Lobscouse and so it came on to the ships where the Liverpool seaman cut it, as he cuts so many words, to Scouse. But Lobscouse is eaten all over Lancashire of course and, as Lobby, is found in the Midlands too. (See Scowle and Other Papers" by Bernard Hollowood.) We may have got it from the sea but our scouse in Liverpool is really Irish stew. It is found, by the way, in Smollett *Lob's course*. A stew of bits of meat and any vegetable that was going, "somethink to stick to thur ribs" was as popular with a poor mother with lots of kids years ago as it was with the sailors, some of whom would not join their ships unless it was guaranteed . . . for breakfast! And the poor people were often Irish, of course. The kids were sent for "A pennorth a bits fer the dog, anough to make scouse fer the lot a yez", but, if meat could not be afforded, vegetables alone would serve and then it was "blind scouse" a dish like the Irish concannon.

Vegetables were long said to be better served in Liverpool than elsewhere in England due to the French neutrals who arrived in the port in 1756 and the Formby area, very shortly after Raleigh's importing his "curious exotic in the Garden of the nobility", was the first in England to grow potatoes commercially after a shipload from Ireland floated into Southport from a wreck. We certainly still like our spuds in Scousetown.

A cart selling cheap stew in a poor area at the turn of the century was popularly known as the "Scouse boat".

Food, by the way, in general is called "chuck", which also means "bread"; the word started life as a ship's biscuit, I believe.

Another traditional dish of the poor was "potatoes and point". A plate consisting of nothing but potatoes was put before the hungry lad and he pointed at a potato and called it chicken or something equally tasty, and imagination must do the rest.

Dockers dine at the "cokes". Cocoa goes with philanthropy and these cocoa-rooms were started in the last century to woo the docker from stronger drink but though they did not do that, in fact no longer sell cocoa, they do provide cheap meals.

A "cob" is a roll, the word meaning a piece, and I have heard a Liverpool councillor confounding the waiter in a high-class London hotel by demanding his "cob". A cob is a piece of meat too, and the hall where Gypsy Smith used to give free pieces of meat to the poor was known as Cob Hall. (A man in a temper, with a chip on his shoulder, is said to "have a cob on".)

When a Scouse (or Pud) says "Let's ave some chips" or "I ad some beer" he gives more emphasis to the "some" than is usual

elsewhere which again shows Yankee influence. (*Some* lad and *some* girl are the Nobodies who do all the naughty things at school). He likes a large portion when he has some scouse or *Finny Addy* or what-you-will; a *Dirty Big* plateful. (Big is commonly so "qualified" by Dirty).

If his Judy gives him a lunch to eat at work *(Carrying Out)* she may be generous and wrap it up in last night's *Echo* (A mean person "woundn give yuh las night's *Echo*"), or he may have a special tin whose name has crossed the Atlantic a *Growler*.

Chippies sell chips, scallops, fish, peas. ("Plenty er salt and vinegar").

Once Mary Ellen baked her own bread. When the dough and the barm had been mixed (Mary Ellen no doubt "sweating cobs" i.e. perspiring freely) in a large pan-mug, the mass was tipped into a pillow case and one of the children took it to a bake-house and got a *Tally** for it and remembered for years after the sweet and pungent smells of those smoke-filled cellars.

Children liked to buy loaves too, for the baker usually placed on the loaf's as on a horse, the *Jockey*. This was to make it up to legal weight but if he knew his business he saw no child failed to get one. In the shop too would be *Icers* (ice cakes), *Fly's Cemeteries* (pronounced symmetries) i.e. Eccles cakes, *Barm Cakes* (whose "barmy" association gave this as a name for a stupid person). *Wet Nellers, Bunloaf*. Bunloaf was what southrons call Christmas Cake and something in its solidity led Billy Boys (Orangemen) to call a Priest Fr. Bunloaf.

Winkles are called "kewins" from an old fish-dealer named McEwan.

Tommy Handley loved Wet Nellers which were pudding or Nelson cakes whose wetness came from burnt sugar. Liverpool kids have to know how to shop. From three years of age they are sent, clutching tight the coins, muttering the message "Alf a quarter er rody bacon and change out." (Lord have mercy on one if he lost the change). The shop was often a "Johnny All Sorts." He ran for jam in a cup, for *Conny Onny* (condensed milk) *Maggie Ann* (margarine) *Corned Jock* (or dog) *Spice Balls* (called elsewhere savoury ducks or faggots) or a nice *Crubeen*. A crubeen is a pig's foot (Irish) and well-beloved even though the drunken fellow feeling for his supper in the dark was found next morning to have eaten up to his elbow. Spice balls, like salt fish, were thought rather low but on kids who had gone some hours with just a *Butty* (a piece of bread, perhaps buttered but there were jam butties, sugar butties, etc.) even, if a large one, (a *Tramstopper*) helped out maybe with a ha'porth of *Fades* (damaged apples) or of broken biscuits, no culinary snobbery had effect. If his mam had made from the cheapest bits of meat some *Pea Whack* (soup) he was contented.

* Recently one of these puzzled a team of antiquarians in a B.B.C. show: the tally on the telly, as it were.

When he was older he'd have his pig's foot, his pig's cheek, his spare-rib, his haddock. And even a middle-class Liverpolitan would feel nostalgic appetite if presented with the menu proposed for the first Annual Dinner of the Liverpool Dialect Society:—

PEA WHACK.

FINNY ADDY.

SCOUSE, SPUR-RIBS*

WET NELLER, JUMBO TOFFEE.

TEA.

(well-brood an teemed out quickly).

* 'The spur-ribs was the gear' (excellent).

A PROMISE

Just harken heaw he welcomes Spring,
Wi' reight goodwill!
Uv songsters he is surely king,
Th' owd Yella-bill!

He doesna ceawr up theer fer rest,
Ner silly pride.
He's eawt to give his gradely best,
An' mooare beside!

Ah never yerd the likes uv him
Fer mony a day.
Ah'll sweear The Holy Seraphim
Inspired his lay!

Ah know he adds a deal o' grace
An' lastin' bliss,
To Nature's everchangin' face,
Wi' song like this.

An' wi' joyful din Ah yer
This promise true;
If days be ayther breet or drear
He'll sing 'em thru!

NICHOLAS FREESTON.

MY MAM'S BIRTHDAY

O Muse! coom thi deawn fro' wheerever thy are.
Stand reyt here beside me, neaw doan'd stir sa far.
Ah need thi help badly in writin' this rhyme,
Fer my owd Mam's birthday—hoo's eighty this time!
So bring eawt that gem-studded casket o' thine,
Ah'll pick priceless presents fer this Mam o' mine.

Ah'll give her o t' stars on a necklet o' gowd—
'Side leet in her een they'll seem dimmer an' cowd!
Ah'll give her sich roses as Eden ne'er knew,
Ah'll bathe her tired brow wi'thu sweet-scented dew;
An' them precious petals sa luvly an' sleek
'Ull corl up wi' envy at touch uv her cheek!

Fro' t' glades that look up to her 'luved Lakeland hills,
Ah'll bring that shy songster whose sweet music fills
O t' gloom wi' enchantment wheer lisnin trees throng;
In turn he'll be charmed by the seawnd uv her song!

Ah'll give her—nay Muse! put mi feet back on t' flooar,
Ur Doomsday 'ull find me still givin' her mooar;
An' that wouldna do, fer when Gabriel coom deawn
He'd see what Ah 'tended to do wi' his creawn.

So Ah'll just say, "Dear Mam Ah wish yo' reyt weel,
Tho' Ah'm stuck fer words, yo' know just how Ah feel.
God bless yo'! Ah thank yo' fer o that yo've done,
An' fer bein my Mam.

Fro' yo're luvin' son".

NICHOLAS FREESTON.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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THE STALYBRIDGE SINGERS*

On March 5th, 1857, the expanding industrial town of Stalybridge was granted a Charter of Incorporation. In the recent centenary celebrations of the borough a meeting was held to commemorate the work of many writers, some of great merit, whose works have reflected in their different ways the changing aspects of life in the town during the hundred years which have passed. Many of these writers have had a fame which was more than merely local, and their contributions to lyric poetry were properly appraised in the address given on that occasion on "The Stalybridge Singers".†

Stalybridge lies upon the boundary of Cheshire and Lancashire. The river Tame, which was formerly the county boundary, flows through the middle of the town which, for administrative purposes, belongs to Cheshire, although there have been numerous attempts in recent years to unite Stalybridge with Ashton-under-Lyne, its nearest Lancashire neighbour, to form a county borough.

The dialect of Stalybridge is that of a marginal area between counties, although trade and industry have linked it more closely with Lancashire than Cheshire. Those of its poets who have written in dialect have used language which is very similar to that of the South Lancashire cotton towns.

The earliest poets of the town, however, write not in dialect, but in the ornate language of late eighteenth century poetry. To some extent this may be described as a literary dialect with its pastoral conventions which turn ladies into "nymphs", gentlemen into "swains", and breezes into "zephyrs"; and its heavy circumlocution which disguises ordinary spoken English in order to give loftiness and dignity to verse.

The poetry of Francis Dukinfield Astley, scholar and gentleman, typifies in many ways the spirit of eighteenth century verse:

> Whilst Bacchus holds his empire here, Diana sure will join,
> And when we tell our gallant runs, we'll pledge her sports in wine;
> For from her sports proceeding, health gives the ruddy glow,
> Driving care
> And despair,
> Though the stormy winds do blow.

Astley, however, belonged to the local gentry and hardly typifies the life of the ordinary man of the times. The writings of John Jones, who was successfully sailor, carder, and, probably, night watchman,

* The Editor wishes to acknowledge the help given by Mr. Harry Jones, of Stalybridge, author of the admirable *Short History of Stalybridge* in the town's Centenary Guide, who made available his own private anthology of poems by Stalybridge writers.

† The speaker was Mr. John Cassidy at a meeting organized by the Lancashire Authors' Association. A summary of his lecture is to be found in *The Record*, vol. 176, pp. 4-6.

contain verse which is more strictly eighteenth century than that of Astley. His poem "The Cotton Mill" celebrates the triumphant progress of technology in a fashion which is rare, if not unique, in this kind of poetry. There must, surely, be few other poems in this style describing the inside of a cotton mill:

> The carriage, now behold, with stately grace
> March from the fixtures, and recoil apace,
> Th'advancing spindles to the sight confest,
> Appear like vet'rans when they move abreast;
> Or like the billows when the breezes blow
> From land, retreating now, and now they flow.
> One hand the spinner to the wheel extends,
> And with the other gently guides the ends;
>
> * * * *
>
> While broken ends the piecers nimbly join,
> Who seldom long their humble post resign.*

The eighteenth century influence does not end here. George Smith, another local writer of humble origin, numbers amongst his poems two, "The Neglected Bard" and "The Mountain Minstrel", which suggest the influence of Grey, Thompson, and other eighteenth century poets.

Eighteenth century verse was well suited to panegyric, and the early history of Stalybridge, although often violent and unsettled, is marked in general by a spirit of optimism which often gave rise to poetry of praise. The town was identified in people's minds with the spirit of "Progress". In Disraeli's novel "Coningsby" the hero is told "If you want to see life, go to Stalybridge or Bolton. There's high pressure", and in "Phineas Finn", Trollop's novel of parliamentary life, the Member for Stalybridge symbolises the new forces which entered English life with the Industrial Revolution. It is not surprising then to find in the verse of this period a reflection of this pride in progress:

> Hail Stalybridge! with joyful eyes
> I view each grand improvement made,
> I see, around, new structures rise,
> Auspicious to the sons of trade;§

At times this spirit even becomes one of civic rivalry:

> Hail Stalybridge! since new delights are thine†
> No longer bow to Ashton-under-Lyne.

* John Jones, "The Cotton Mill."

* The rhyme *join-resign* is not bad verse. The modern pronunciation of words with the *oi* sound is from the spelling. At the time this poem was written the pronunciation of *join* would be 'jine,' as it still is in some northern dialects. See H. C. Wyld, *A Short History of English*, pp. 197-8.

§ John Jones, 'Stalybridge and its new set of Bells.'

† John Jones, op. cit.

The town was growing. Its population increased from five thousand five hundred in 1823 to nearly twenty-five thousand in 1861. The greater part of the new population came from the surrounding countryside where it was becoming increasingly difficult for agricultural wages to compete with those which were being offered in the new industrial towns. One of the newcomers was Samuel Laycock, whose family came to Stalybridge from Marsden in Yorkshire in 1837. It is Laycock whose poetry reflects more faithfully than that of any of his contemporaries the changing forms of life in nineteenth century Stalybridge. After the first prosperous years times were uncertain. In 1863 there were "Bread Riots" as a result of the Cotton Famine, and in the years that followed many other clashes took place between the forces of civil authority and the townspeople, who suffered, and often starved, as a result of uncertain trade:

Eh dear! what foin' eawt ther' is;
It does look bad, for sure:
We'n th' young at loggerheads wi' th' owd,
An' th' rich at war wi' th' poor.*

Laycock's poem "Welcome, Bonny Brid" is well known. It reflects the patience and humour with which people in the cotton towns met the difficulties which faced them when work was hard to get. The "bum bailiff" is a familiar figure in verse of this period, and makes an appearance in "Bowton's Yard". Laycock himself records there that:

Aw conno pay mi lodgin' brass becose aw'm eawt' o' wark.

Not all Laycock's poetry is concerned with hard times. His cheerful nature and good humour did not allow him to think of trouble for long. "Th' Owd Bellman" describes a practical joke played on that person which might well have had a basis in fact. In the absence of cinemas, television, and the other ready made diversions of the twentieth century, people were driven to provide their own amusements which often took the form of practical jokes and humour of a boisterous kind. Stories are still current in the town of such legendary characters as "Smosha", the whitewasher, who was made to lie down in the street to provide a chalk outline for his statue; and of "Morrisey" who undertook to swim Chadwick Dam for a wager, but on reaching the half-way mark decided that he was unable to finish the course and swam back to the start.

Another poem by Laycock which deserves to be better known is his "Ode to th' Sun" which illustrates his gift of gentle humour:

Hail, owd friend! aw'm fain to see thi:
Wheer hast t' been so mony days?
Lots of times aw've looked up for thi,
Wishin' aw could see thi face.
Th' little childer reawnd abeawt here
Say they wonder wheer tha'rt gone;
An' they wanten me to ax thee
T' show thisel' as oft as t' con.

* Samuel Laycock.

In difficult times there were many who turned for help to their religion. Indeed, in the Rev. Joseph Stephens, Stalybridge possessed one of the most militant clergymen in the north of England, a reformer and agitator in revolt against the conditions in which people were forced to live:

> We work and wait—we toil and trust, sure that the end will come,
> This wilderness of evil must be clothed with heavenly bloom!*

But, to many, religion was a more personal source of consolation unconnected with social reform. One of the best known poems by any northern writer is "Owd Anvil's Prayer" by Samuel Hill, a disciple of Laycock. The last line of the prayer "Abide with me, it's th' edge o' dark" is one of the most frequently quoted in the dialect literature of the north-west. It would, however, be a mistake to characterise Hill as a religious poet, although religion is never far away in his poems. He had a finely developed sense of humour, and his "Musings from Melandra" echoes the more serious notes of nineteenth century Romantic poetry in a way which does not occur often in other dialect verse in this area.

Perhaps the reason for this may lie in Hill's education which was of a fairly superior kind. On the whole, dialect poetry seldom does reflect the attitude to life which we find in the great Romantics, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats and Shelley, which is often the product of a well educated mind. Dialect verse tends to be more homely in its approach to human problems and to face them with humour rather than with the nobler kinds of resignation:

> My gaffer's made me proper ill,
> What dosta think? He's gan' me t'mill.§

Yet amongst the "Stalybridge Singers" there are some whose verse is in the Romantic vein. Samuel Hill has already been mentioned. John Critchley Prince's poem "Buckton Castle" has the sadness of tone which is often found in Romantic verse. It is however, in Standard English:

> Ye who in crowded town, o'ertoiled, o'erspent,
> For bread's sake cling to desk, forge, wheel and loom,
> Come, when the law allows, and let the bent
> Of your imprisoned minds have health and room;
> So ye may doff the chrysalis of care
> In the pure element of mountain air,
> And on the wings of thought draw nearer unto God.

Randall Mundy, writing at the end of the century, is one of those who attempt this kind of thing in dialect, but his nature poems often have a sense of strain in their tone which is not found in his poems on homelier subjects. Possibly the kind of verse which was written by the Romantics is too sophisticated to be successful in dialect.

* J. R. Stephens, "Scatter the Seed".

§ Arthur Platt.

Understatement rather than hyperbole is the keynote of northern dialect verse. Perhaps it owes something to the mentality of the Norsemen who settled in such numbers in the North during the early Middle Ages. There is something which suggests the tone of the sagas in a great deal of northern dialect literature. Whatever its origins, the literature of this and other towns is worthy of preservation in our own times, for it preserves an attitude to life which is of great value to those who face the stresses of present day living, an attitude which is found all too rarely in contemporary literature.

G.B.

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OVER HILL OVER DALE

Dorothy Una Ratcliffe

109 pp. The Bodley Head, 1956. 12s. 6d.

The title of Dorothy Una Ratcliffe's work might suggest the kind of verse which so frequently appears in the pages of women's magazines. Nothing could be farther from the truth, however. Shakespeare's well known phrase is used to describe a collection of lyric poems which deals mainly with the hills and dales of Dorothy Una Ratcliffe's native Yorkshire.

Most of the poems in this volume are in dialect, the dialect of Wensleydale. Poetry, a modern critic tells us, can communicate before it is understood, but to aid our understanding of the dialect poetry the authoress has thoughtfully provided a glossary of dialect words, something which is in itself of independent value. The book is in three parts "Rhymes of the Dales", "Sea Rhymes", and "Bairn Rhymes"

"Rhymes of the Dales" is the largest of the three sections and contains a remarkable variety of subject matter, ranging from simple pastoral verse in traditional style to verse whose thought and idiom is completely modern. It is these latter poems which evoke the greatest wonder. Dialect verse is all very well when it attempts to deal with the common themes of country life, which have changed relatively little with the centuries, but when it is a question of expressing contemporary attitudes in dialect verse only the best writers are successful. In "A Vast o' Space" the speaker mourns a sweetheart in terms which derive from the world of scientific exploration:

> But happen, noo, thoo's sailin' 'tween isles o' nebulae,
> Watchin' them comet-racers, thoo's been face to face
> Wiv parlous universes, a run-a-gait Mildy Way . . .
> How will I find thee, Sweetheart, in sike a vast o' space?

At times this modernity of expression comes almost as a shock when it follows a passage of verse on traditional line. In "T'Boon Clip", a poem mainly devoted to description of a communal sheep shearing, the conclusion is arresting:

> They wark sae togither . . .
> Whya wean't t' nations hod
> A boonday like our farmers?
> Yan day, they will, please God!

This kind of thing is made possible by an unforced approach to one's subject matter combined with an ability to "think in dialect" about an extremely wide field of experience. There is none of the sense of strain which marks the tone of so much dialect verse on modern themes.

In the second section, "Sea Rhymes", the verse is entirely in Standard English. The majority of the poems deal with impressions of travel in foreign countries, mostly in the North, although a few deal with the Southern Hemisphere. Few of the poems are concerned with the sea itself or with men and ships. The eye of the poetess seems to light chiefly upon deserted coastlines:

> Where willow-scrub and birches
> Long-lying snows endure;
> Where whimbrels trill and whistle
> And golden plovers cry,
> Where wild geese and phalaropes
> To dun-grey waters fly.

Presumably there is no dialect in "Sea Rhymes" because travel and seascapes do not evoke commentary in dialect from the writer, any more than an enquiry from a stranger speaking Standard English would evoke a reply in dialect from a countryman. Dorothy Una Ratcliffe herself remarks that the dale folk will speak to you in Standard English until they have learned to accept you as a friend, after which they will drop into their native dialect. Possibly the strangeness of foreign coasts has provoked a similar reaction in her own poetry.

Of all the poetry in the book the most attractive is to be found amongst the "Bairn Rhymes" which might be translated as "Children's Verse". It is very difficult to write this kind of poetry without false sentiment. Some of the poems in this collection, however, have the simplicity and lack of sentimentality which is so hard to achieve. "Highty Hoss" is the kind of thing which seems easy, but which is in reality extremely difficult:

> Highty-hoss, highty-hoss, wheer ista goin'
> Wi' hooves siller-shod and gowden mane flowin'?
> Steady, aye steady, or thoo'll have a fall
> By rainbow-lit beck or by starry-steaned wall:

It might be argued that one reason for the decline of dialect is the replacement of traditional nursery rhymes in dialect by Standard English literature. The dialect poems in this volume have an appeal which is equal to that of the best modern children's poetry in Standard English.

One's main impression of this volume is one of admiration for the ease and naturalness with which the authoress treats her subject matter. The clarity and the unforced tone of the verse is a welcome contrast to the metaphorical and rhythmical complexity which is apparently necessary to so much modern verse.

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LANCASHIRE DIALECT SOCIETY.

Members are reminded that at the Annual General Meeting of the Society held on 10th January 1957 it was unanimously decided that, with effect from 1st January 1958, the minimum annual subscription should be 5s. Subscriptions for 1958 are due on 1st January 1958. They should be sent to the Hon. Treasurer, Mr. Leslie Procter, Willow House, Waterfoot, Rossendale, Lancs.

D. SUMMERFIELD.

Hon. Secretary.